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ABSTRACT

Semantic and syntactical features of storybooks in the Southwest Regional Laboratory (SWRL) Reading Program are reviewed and analyzed. To make the scripts match children's oral language as closely as possible within other program constraints and to avoid potential semantic difficulties, the following changes are recommended: (1) the introduction of "let's" as a sight word; (2) the introduction of "here" as a sight word, and (3) the deletion of "ask." Approximately 50 script changes are listed by story number and page number. (Author/LL)

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ABSTRACT

Semantic and syntactical features of storybooks in the SWRL Reading Program (Blocks 1 and 2) are reviewed and analyzed. The following changes are recommended to make the script match children's oral language as closely as possible within other Program constraints and to avoid potential semantic difficulties:

(1) the introduction of "let's" as a sight word;

(2) the introduction of "here" as a sight word, and

(3) the deletion of "ask."

The specific script changes (approximately fifty) are listed by story number and page number.

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ANALYSIS OF SEMANTIC AND SYNTACTIC FEATURES OF BLOCK 1&2 STORYBOOKS OF THE SWRL READING PROGRAM

Pamela L. Coker

Basic syntactic and semantic considerations for the SWRL reading programs have been outlined by Hatch, 1970; Jenkins, 1971a, 1971b; Fiege-Kollmann, 1972; and McCoard, 1972. Although some of the considerations conflict with constraints imposed by Rules of Correspondence sequencing, some conditioning of the storybook script can minimize the consequent problems. This paper outlines those changes which can be made with relative ease in Blocks 1 and 2 of the reading program and recommends the introduction of two sight words not now included and the deletion of one rule-based word presently included. These few changes alter approximately 50 lines of script while substantially decreasing potential ambiguities present in the content of the stories.

"Let Us"

Hatch, 1970; Fiege-Kollmann, 1972; and McCoard, 1972, point out that "let us" is used both correctly to mean "allow us" and incorrectly to mean "let's" as in "let's go." Hence sentences such as "Let us go on a trip" (19/1)[1] may be interpreted to mean "Can we go on a trip?" when they are in fact intended to mean the suggestive sense of "Why don't we go on a trip." This suggestive sense can only be conveyed by the contracted form "let's."

To avoid forcing the child to interpret "let us" as "let's," it is recommended that "let's" be introduced either as a rule-based word or

[1]Story and page numbers.

as a sight word. If it is introduced as a rule-based word it cannot be introduced until Story 14 which is when "let" is introduced. Final s is introduced in Story 12 which gives the child "pits" and "sits" making final s easily applicable to "let" in Story 14. If "let's" is introduced as a sight word, it can, of course, be introduced much earlier.

The only complication arises from the apostrophe; however, this may not present a problem for the child. Coleman, 1970, found that pre-reading children (aged 4/0-6/3) on a sight word basis learned "I've," "I'm," and "I'd" with 6-9 errors before mastery which is relatively low when compared to 22 errors for "with" (a sight word introduced in Story 3).

Table 1 lists the specific sentences in Blocks 1 and 2 and their revisions. "Let us" remains in the stories to mean only "allow us."

"We Will"

Hatch (1970) suggested that the future tense be eliminated from first year reading. Herriot (1969) found that children do not comprehend the future tense when it is contrasted with the present tense until 6/0. Although this evidence is not conclusive, it is suggestive enough to warrant careful consideration for the SWRL readers especially since 25% of the sentences are in the future tense and only 4% are in the past tense (McCoard 1972). Hatch, 1970; Jenkins, 1971a, 1971b; and McCoard, 1972, propose that "I will" should be replaced with "I am going to." Since two syllable words are clearly unacceptable in Blocks 1 and 2 it seems unreasonable to make such a major change without more conclusive evidence. Until this data is collected it is recommended that

"let's" replace the "We will" sentences that are actually intended to mean "let's." This will cut down somewhat on the high percentage of sentences in the future tense as well as clear up awkward sentences such as "We will play, Nat" (8/12) meaning "Let's play, Nat."

Table 2 gives the specific "We will" sentences for Blocks 1 and 2. In order to change the first three sentences 6/2, 6/5, and 8/12 "let's" must be introduced as a sight word in Story 6.

"There"

There are many cases in Blocks 1 and 2 where "there" is used to mean "here." These uses are either locational such as "We are there" (6/16) to mean "We have arrived here at our destination" or idiomatic such as "There I go" (2/9) for the idiom "Here I go."

It is recommended that "here" be introduced in Story 2 as a sight word. This would not exceed the limit of three new words per story since "you" and "there" are the only new words in Story 2. The introduction of "here" decreases many of the locational ambiguities in the stories. Table 3 lists the specific script changes. "Here" is used for a location close to the speaker and "there" remains to mean "over there." "Here" is also used in the idiom "Here I go" and "there" remains as a dummy as in "There is the log."

"Ask"

Carol Chomsky (1969) found that children between five and ten treat "ask" to mean "tell." "Ask" is an exception to the rule (Minimal Distance Principle) that assigns the implicit subject of the complement verb as the noun phrase most closely preceding it. For example, in

"John told Mary where to go" it is Mary who is going but in "John asked Mary where to go" it is John who is going. The following table shows Chomsky's results for "ask" and "tell."

TABLE A

"Ask" and "Tell" (Based on C. Chomsky 1969)

Sentence	Interpretation					
	Stage	A	B	C	D	E
	Age Range	5/6-7/6	6/6-6/9	5/2-10/10	6/9-8/8	5/10-9/9
	Mean Age*	5/7	6/6	7/7	7/7	8/5
Ask x what time it is.		tell	ask	ask	ask	ask
Ask x his last name.		tell	tell	ask	ask	ask
Ask x what to feed the doll.		tell	tell	tell	ask**	ask
Tell x what time it is.		tell	tell	tell	tell	tell
Tell x your last name.		tell	tell	tell	tell	tell
Tell x what to feed the doll.		tell	tell	tell	tell	tell

*Mean age is relatively useless because the age ranges are very large.

**Ask is interpreted as a question but the wrong subject is assigned to the complement verb: (1) "What are you going to feed the doll?" instead of (2) "What should I feed the doll?"

It is clear that children in the SWRL Reading Program aged 4/9 to 5/9 would have great difficulty with "ask." Since there are only six occurrences of "ask" in Blocks 1 and 2, it is recommended that "ask" be removed from the vocabulary used for the stories. Table 4 lists the "ask" sentences and the recommended changes which are within the program.

Subject-Verb-Object Ordering

The basic grammatical order of an English sentence is Subject-Verb-Object (S-V-O). Deviations from this order can present problems for the child at this age (Hatch, 1971; McCoard, 1972; Slobin, 1967). For example, children adopt a S-V-O processing strategy for passive sentences and thus misinterpret "The boy was hit by the girl" to mean "The boy hit the girl." To avoid confusion of this sort it is recommended that those sentences which violate S-V-O order be changed to the more basic S-V-O order. There are only five sentences of this type. These are listed in Table 5.

Other Changes

There are some recommended changes which do not fit into any one category. Basically, these changes are intended to clarify the plot of the story as well as smooth over some of the transitions from page to page. All of these changes utilize the elements already within the program. The specific changes are listed in Table 6.

Picture Changes

There are several pictures in the stories which contradict the accompanying sentence. Since the child does not have the vocabulary a sentence change would require, it is recommended instead that the pictures be changed to match the sentences. This problem only occurs in Story 12. The specific changes are listed in Table 7.

TABLE 1

"Let Us"

Story/Page	Original Sentence	Revised Sentence
18/4	Let us put Snap in a tub.	Let's put Snap in a tub.
19/1	Let us go on a trip. Let us go there.	Let's go on a trip. Let's go there.
19/3	A drum! Let us run to it.	A drum! Let's run to it.
23/15	Let us go on the ship.	Let's go on the ship.
27/1	Let us go to the pond.	Let's go to the pond.
34/1	Let us dig them out.	Let's dig them out.

TABLE 2

"We Will"

Story/Page	Original Sentence	Revised Sentences
6/2	We will go there.	Let's go there.
6/5	We will play there.	Let's go there.
8/12	We will play, Nat.	Let's play, Nat.
14/12	We will go to the den.	Let's go to the den.
22/4	We will go with the band.	Let's go with the band.
24/3	We will go in the den.	Let's go in the den.
26/1	See this. We will play with it.	See this. Let's play with it.
30/2	We will swim. We will swim in the pond.	Let's swim. Let's swim in the pond.
31/2	We will put up the tent.	Let's put up the tent.

TABLE 3

"There"

Story/Page	Sentence	Revised Sentence
2/4	Play, play.	I will play here.
2/6	Play there.	Play here.
2/9	There I go.	Here I go.
2/12	There I go.	Here I go.
2/15	There I go.	Here I go.
3/9	There I go.	Here I go.
3/13	I will go there.	I will go here.
6/13	We are there.	We are here.
9/13	There I go.	Here I go.
16/1	There is the band.	Here is the band.
18/2	We put you there, Pat	We will put you in here, Pat.
24/7	The tub is not there.	The tub is not here.
31/2	We can camp there.	We can camp here.
37/2	Dash is out there. You will be out there next.	Dash is out here. You will be out here next.

TABLE 4

"Ask"

Story/Page	Original Sentence	Revised Sentence
29/2	I will ask Pat to go with me.	Pat, will you go with me?
29/6	Ask him, Pat.	delete sentence
29/7	I will not ask him. You ask him, Lil.	delete frame
30/5	Ask Pat to swim with us.	Pat, will you swim with us?
33/3	I will ask him to help us.	He can help us.

TABLE 5

Violation of S-V-O Ordering

Story/Page	Sentence	Suggestions
9/10*	You a.e?	Are you?
12/5	There you go.	cut the frame
31/1	To camp we go.	We go to camp.
36/8	"I want to jump," yells Tip.	Tip yells, "I want to jump."
36/14	"Down I go," yells Tip.	Tip yells, "Down I go."

*Syntactically, questions are expressed by an inversion of the auxilliary and the subject. The only cue that this is a question is the question mark.

TABLE 6

Other Changes

Story/Page	Original Sentence	Revised Sentence
6/12	I will go to the log.	We will go to the log.
6/14	Are you there?	cut frame
6/15	We are.	We are here.
6/16	We play on the log.	We are on the log.
8/10	Are you there?	Are you in there?
12/6	Lil sits.	Lil sits on Pat.
12/12	Tip sits.	Tip sits on Pat.
13/16	Pat and Snap play.	Pat and Snap sit.
15/8	Tut, Lil, and Snap play in it.	Tut, Lil, and Snap are in it.
15/10	Let us land on the log.	Will we land on the log?
15/11	Land us there.	Let's land there.

TABLE 7

Picture Changes

Story/Page	Sentence	Picture Change
12/1	Pat sits still.	have Pat sitting up
12/5	There you go.	have Pat sitting up
12/9	Pat sits there.	have Pat sitting up
12/10	The log slips.	have Pat sitting up
12/16	Pat sits still.	have Pat sitting up

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